

DENVER ROCKY MOUNTAIN NEWS (CO)
17 September 1981

Suspect in Libyan's shooting says he thought orders came from CIA

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Accused hit man Eugene A. Tafoya said Wednesday he thought he was on a secret mission for the CIA last October when he met and struggled with Libyan dissident student Faisal Zagallai in Fort Collins. Zagallai was shot twice in the head during the incident.

In a Larimer County Jail yard meeting with three reporters, the 47-year-old former Green Beret said he met a man in Toronto who identified himself as working for "the company" and who eventually sent Tafoya on globe-trotting missions culminating with the shooting in Zagallai's apartment.

Tafoya told reporters invited from the Rocky Mountain News and two television organizations that he had received orders in an unmarked envelope in London to go to Fort Collins and tell Zagallai to tone down his political rhetoric. The mission was not to shoot Zagallai, Tafoya said.

Tafoya, a longtime resident of Truth or Consequences, N.M., who unsuccessfully ran for city office there, said he's now uncertain who really was giving him the "CIA" orders he received. "It's really difficult to say who was working with whom," he said. "At this point in time, anything is possible."

Although not going into the details of the actual altercation, Tafoya said he was "trying to get the hell out of there" (Zagallai's apartment) when the graduate student tried to stop him from leaving. Tafoya suggested that he fired in self-defense.

Tafoya also confirmed a report that he had worked in Libya for former CIA operative Edwin P. Wilson. He complained that Wilson owed him \$36,000.

Breaking with its policy, the CIA told the News that Tafoya had never worked for the CIA.

However, agency spokeswoman Kathy Pheron declined to answer whether Tafoya had ever

sought work at the agency. Tafoya insisted to reporters that he had applied at the CIA, and called that the primary reason he believed the orders in the envelope came from the agency. He said the man he met in Toronto appeared to know the contents of his CIA application.

The mysterious man in Toronto also carried what appeared to be CIA credentials and said he worked "for the company," Tafoya alleged.

Authorities have said they believe Tafoya is a hired gun, possibly retained by agents for the government of Libyan strongman Moammar Khadafy to kill Zagallai.

Wednesday's interview was in an enclosed yard outside the Larimer County Jail. As two sheriff's deputies stood at attention along a wall, Tafoya sat on one side of two rickety card tables while facing the three reporters.

The events leading up to the shooting began a few years ago when the man from Toronto called proposing a job, Tafoya said.

Tafoya traveled to Toronto and, in a "casual" meeting in a top-floor dining room of a Holiday Inn, discussed possibilities. Another man quietly sat by. He had a foreign accent, Tafoya said, probably Belgian.

Tafoya didn't describe the mystery man except to say he had a "Washingtonian look."

Tafoya said he returned to Truth or Consequences and awaited for the man to call, telling him where he'd be sent. After several months, Tafoya received a call saying there was a job in Libya.

Once in Libya, Tafoya said he went to work for Wilson. On three visits over five months, Tafoya said about all he did was fix clutches on two Volkswagens and visit some Roman ruins. He said he was supposed to train Libyan soldiers in squad tactics, but never saw a classroom.

He admitted \$36,000 was a little steep for what basically amounted to a five-month vacation, but Tafoya said "if you've ever seen Arabs spend money" it wouldn't be surprising.

In Libya, Tafoya said he worked mostly with Britons, not with other former Green Berets Wilson reportedly recruited.

But Tafoya moonlighted in Tripoli, he said. After receiving various "letter drop" persons he believed to be CIA operatives, he said he spied on Wilson and took pictures of what supposedly was a Libyan nuclear facility.

He said he was paid for this moonlighting in cash given to him in envelopes. The compensation for the spying was about \$2,000 a month after expenses, he said.

About three to four weeks before Zagallai's shooting, Tafoya said he received instructions while in London to travel to Fort Collins.

Zagallai has told authorities that about 10 minutes after he let Tafoya in his apartment, Tafoya hit him, drew a gun and shot him twice in the head.

Zagallai survived, but lost vision in one eye. Police say a woman arranged for Tafoya to get into Zagallai's apartment by calling the day before and claiming to represent a company wanting to interview Zagallai for a job. Tafoya showed up the next day as the interviewer.

The ex-soldier, who received several decorations for valor in Vietnam, told the reporters that he doesn't know who the woman was. That was arranged by parties unknown, he said.

He said he'd been ordered to go to Zagallai's apartment and tell Zagallai to "knock off whatever he was doing," apparently referring to Zagallai's alleged support for the Palestine Liberation Organization.

The pock-marked, bearded Tafoya was often unsure of exact dates when retracing his moves leading up to the shooting.

Tafoya is fighting for reduction in his \$500,000 bond. He said that he's being afforded "all the constitutional right of a California fruit fly."

He claims the United States, which he said he served faithfully, has abandoned him.